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DANGERS AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE PROJECT

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The project method, if used skilfully, is the best yet offered: the child really learns to do by doing. He finds a use for all that he has learned from books. He is delightfully busy all the time and at the same time directs his own conduct, thinks through his own difficulty, and clears away his own pitfalls. We must agree that such a course does prepare the child for bridging the gulf between school life and the life of the world outside. This method enables the conscientious teacher to teach better, but it has some serious dangers.

The project method is dangerous in the hands of the shirker because it affords too much leeway for her type. The teacher with little ability who attempts to use it may fail to hold the indolent and dull pupils. The weak disciplinarian may entirely lose control of her class. It is likely to consume more time than the formal recitation method. It requires better scholarship on the part of the teacher. She must study and read widely.

Many of us have thought that we should beguile the child into an activity which we felt would enrich his life but that if the child knew our aim it might destroy his interest. Just this mistake has been the cause of many of our failures. We have labored in the past to *make* educational work interesting to children by any device possible. If we could cease trying to *make* things interesting and maneuver to lead the child by legitimate educational appeals to *take* an interest, we would be opening fine fields of possibilities into which he would need only to be turned. Any activity that is educational should be wrought with such interest that the more knowledge gained about it the more interest the child would feel.

Another cause of failure is a lack of teacher sincerity. The teacher must not dictate either the purpose or the plan of the

pupils' activity, and yet it is rather shortsighted to feel that projects should always originate with the pupils. The essential thing for us to keep in mind is that the child should voluntarily choose the course of activity, make and carry out his own plans. Such a method is surely a fine one in the hands of honest teachers.

It must be admitted, however, that with our present curriculum, administration, and supervision, it is not easy to bring to the child the various project materials necessary to provoke volitional activity nor to take him where he may find them. Therefore it is essential that the teacher using the method be a tactful leader rather than a dictator, an engineer who gives momentum to the purpose by skilful maneuvers in the background, from which she appears only when needed.

With the growing complexity of life it appears that a great deal of education must be acquired directly by experience in the school of life itself. In no better way can the need be served than by the following type of work:

Speech Week was observed in our school last year with a great deal of pomp as far as program was concerned. It appeared to a thoughtful little girl that it might not do much good to make resolutions, posters and slogans during Good Speech Week if the work of improving speech were not continued all the time. A discussion arose in the English class as to just what might be done. Sixty-five eighth-grade pupils working in a departmental unit decided, after much discourse and some delay, to form themselves into a club. It required some time to select a name, but the time was well spent. They chose to be known thereafter as the Good Speech Circle of Indiana Avenue School. Since two entire periods did not prove sufficient for them to outline a plan of work, they selected a committee to bring in suggestions. I waited anxiously for their plans. After a few days they asked permission to present the report to the class. The committee selected the following lines of work: the conducting of oral debates and four-minute speeches, the writing of compositions and biographies. All of the work was to be of such a quality that it could be kept to inform and serve the needs of other pupils, and especially would be fit for use as program features for the members of the Good Speech Circle.

The next problem to present itself was the selection of a theme topic democratic enough to answer their purpose. This took perhaps longer than the choosing of a name for the club. They finally agreed that "Men and Women Worth While in Atlantic City's History" would be the title of their project.

The circle divided itself for working purposes into three groups—professional, business, and political. The members of each group met with their leader, who presented a list of names, discussed the work, and made with the consent of his group individual assignments. After the activity was well on its way, it was agreed that all research work was to be done voluntarily after school hours. Interviews were to be personal whenever possible, though those received through correspondence would be accepted. The working in groups had many advantages. Chief among these was the training in ability to co-operate. There was much wholesome rivalry within each group as well as great competition between the groups as a whole.

It surprised me to find that the project was utilized in all the types of oral and written composition, but one of the most gratifying features was the delightful team work it necessitated. I was more than pleased to learn that the two sections, "A" and "B," formerly somewhat hostile, had decided to combine their efforts, to give freely of material which they did not need, and to direct members of any group to places where valuable information and material could be had. Their research often extended from three forty-five into the early evening. Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and rainy days on which there were half sessions had a new charm. Many persons and places impossible to visit because school and office hours conflicted could be reached during this "movie" time. The various groups took turns in taking charge of the class periods. There was always some new surprise to report. After each one of these socialized recitations, criticism was in order and assignments were made for technical study and drill. This work was approached with more interest and attention than ever before, because they now had very definite needs for such knowledge.

The class method of solving the many problems involved in working out their chosen project aroused interest and thoughtful

activity throughout the community. Through the influence of the class interviews the leading local newspaper started a series of articles "Become Acquainted With Our Most Prominent Citizens" but the boys and girls excelled their rival because they were able to get nearer the hearts of men and women. The editorial staff proved no match for the sixty-five members of the Good Speech Circle.

The class succeeded in interviewing a number of prominent people, enough to compile a volume consisting of two hundred forty-eight pages. They also included many photographs of the most prominent citizens and pictures of places of interest. The book contains fifty views of the city forty, fifty, and seventy-five years ago. These were donated by one of Atlantic City's pioneers, who also gave them an illustrated lecture to which they issued invitations. Not only did the most successful, busiest, most influential people of the city give lavishly of their time to converse with these young people, encouraging, suggesting, and often sharing very personal experiences, but a few also gave of their precious time to give the club inspiring talks concerning the city and its people.

The boys and girls had now completed what they called a real book. Was not the title printed on the front cover and just inside? Its first pages also displayed a photograph of their class (taken by one of its own members), an introduction, a list of honorary names, table of contents, a map of the city and lists of statistics showing its miraculous growth. Is there any wonder, then, that they had visions beyond the joy in doing the work, even beyond treasuring the manuscript within their school for inspiration to future classmates? Naturally they discussed its publication, but members of the class objected because they had included biographies and information which they had promised not to publish beyond the classroom.

I sympathized with the children in their new ambition, because they had borrowed and read books from pioneers. They had gone through everything of a similar kind at the library and were perhaps justified in feeling that their collection, crude as it is, from the viewpoint of literary excellence, is nevertheless the latest, most complete history of their city. It presents a large majority of its worth-

while people, with a great deal that they have contributed toward making Atlantic City the most popular resort in the world.

About this time the air was full of commencement. It was suggested that they might plan a dramatization for a commencement feature, using especially valuable experiences in the solution of some of their problems, and that they might invite those who had contributed to the cause. Accordingly, a classroom scene was arranged for the closing evening. The large auditorium was crowded to overflowing with an audience who listened enthusiastically to the reports just as they were given in the real classroom. A pupil teacher and a class chairman received clever answers from members of the various groups. They told what they thought valuable about the work. High lights of personal interest to them were described; delightfully humorous and instructive experiences were related, to the delight of all present. Thus ended a project which enriched and held the interest of the entire class from Good Speech Week through June seventeenth.

CONSOLATION

Once when my eagerness was crushed and bent
From striving to speak nobly of some book
To those whose sides in ugly laughter shook
At my eccentric zeal, my tired eyes went
In search of balm for my discouragement;
And they were met by a bright starry look
In the eyes of one young lad, as if a brook
Repaid the sky the radiance it had lent.
Then he and I passed inward through that story
Into the blessed land where truth is sure
And everlasting, where no one feels shame
For loving loveliness in all its glory;
Where gentleness and quietude endure,
And reason burns with a clear, steady flame.

HOXIE NEALE FAIRCHILD